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PLAIN and MODEST

P L E A

FOR

CHRISTIANITY;

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OR, A

Sober and Rational APPEAL to
INFIDELS:

Occasioned by the Perusal of some of
their late Productions, particularly a TREA-
TISE intitled,

CHRISTIANITY *not founded on Ar-*
gument.

[By John Mason, M. A.]

Φάσκοντες ἔναι σοφοὶ, ἐμωράνθησαν. Paul.

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A
P L E A
FOR
CHRISTIANITY,
OR, AN
APPEAL to INFIDELS.

GENTLEMEN,

IT matters not *by whom* this plain and sober Address is directed to you. In the Sequel you will see it comes from one, who is not ashamed of his unshaken Attachment to the *Religion of Jesus Christ*; and, if I know my own Heart, it proceeds purely from the high Esteem I have for *that*, and from that Principle of universal and disinterested *Benevolence* it inspires.

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The

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The Prevalence of *Infidelity* in the present Age, to a Degree that eminently intitles it to the Character of the *Ætas Infidelium*, is not, I apprehend, very difficult to be accounted for. It is but the *Abuse* of that *Light* and *Liberty*, which at this Day is so fully and freely enjoyed by *Protestants* and *Britons*. As *Licentiousness* is the ordinary *Abuse* of the best *Civil Constitutions*; so is *Infidelity*, of the best *Religious Institution*. And whilst there remains a Perverseness in the Human Nature, that inclines some Men to make the *worst Abuse* of the *best Things*, neither the one, nor the other, can be avoided. *Rebels* there will be under the best constituted *Government*; and *Unbelievers* under the best instituted *Religion* in the World. The utmost *Lenity* and *Latitude* indulged by them, consistent with the *Happiness of Mankind*, cannot prevent the *Disaffection* of those that are ignorant of *their own*. The *wisest Laws* will never restrain those who are resolved not to *obey*, nor the *strongest Evidence* convince those who are determined not to *believe*.

But this, you will say, is shamefully *begging the Question* at the Beginning, and ungenerously loading you with a *Charge* you are not conscious you deserve. I ingenuously retract it then, as what may possibly appear

appear a little too prejudicate :—But with this *Proviso*, that you shew the same Ingenuity in retracting all the *pointed Invectives* you have so plentifully thrown out against the *Advocates for Christianity*, before you have disproved or answered their Arguments. For it must be owned, that *you yourselves* are a little too apt to *exult* in an *unfinished Debate*; and to mistake a pre-mature Triumph, for a fair and undisputed Conquest.

But my Business is, not to recriminate, but to remonstrate, and to propose to your cool and serious Consideration a few plain *Queries*, to which you would do well to attend very impartially, before you grow too sanguine in your imagined Success against your *Christian Antagonists*. And therefore, in the First Place, let me beseech you, *Gentlemen*, seriously to consider with yourselves,

QUERY I.

What are the real Ends and Views of your repeated, earnest, and unwearied Attempts to render the World disaffected to the Christian Religion?

And upon the most laborious Recollection, I can conceive but *Two Principles* that can be supposed to be your *real Motives*

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tives herein: The one a very good one, and the other a very bad one. And they are *Benevolence*, or *Ambition*.

If the *former* of these be your *real Motive*, your Design is undoubtedly great, generous, and laudable. Your *main View* then is, we will suppose, to *disabuse* your Fellow-Creatures; to open their Eyes to a very important *Mistake*, they have imbibed through the authoritative Influences of *Education*, and ever since retained through an Inability to get rid of those early and arbitrary Impressions; and to communicate to them the *Light* you have received, and the *Knowledge* you have attained by the Help of superiour Parts and Application, or by taking more Care than others to throw off the Prejudices of youthful Institutions.

But if you are really touched with this humane and compassionate Concern for our Weaknesses and Errors, and your *great End* is only to *set us right* in our Understandings, (as Charity would lead us to think it is,) why are your Documents delivered so much in a Way of *Raillery*? Why must we be *jeered* into a better Judgment? The Subject is serious and important; and if you have indeed that hearty Concern for our better Information which you profess, suitable to the Seriousness and

and Importance of the Subject, it is very ill-judged to mix *Sarcasms* with your *Arguments*. This is rather to *upbraid*, than *pity* our Ignorance; it hath the Air of *Insult* rather than *Kindness*; and is a very incongruous and uncompassionate Method to be used with tender Consciences and weak Understandings. Did you lay down your Reasons, and propose your Arguments, in plain Terms, and with a Perspicuity and Openness becoming your Sollicitude for our better Information, we would readily pay them all the Regard we thought due to their Weight, and thank you for the friendly Office? But when we find ourselves entertained with *Harangue* instead of *Argument*, with *Hypothesis* instead of *Fact*, and *Raillery* instead of *Reason*, we desire to be excused, if we cannot, with all our Charity, persuade ourselves, that our *Information* is your *great and leading View*.

And this is apt to tempt us sometimes to suspect, that the *main Spring* of your *Opposition* to the *Christian Scheme* is not *Benevolence*, but *Ambition*, or an Affectation of being thought to have more Penetration and Wisdom, and a greater Share of Sense and Understanding than the rest of the World; a Desire to display your Talents, and *make a Figure* in the Eyes of Mankind,

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Mankind, by discovering a more exact and delicate Judgment, that is shocked with Difficulties which others overlook, and discerns an Argument where others can see none.

A Desire to seem *wiser* and *more sagacious* than others is a *Foible* of the Human Mind, from which few Persons of lively Parts and elevated Fancy are exempt. A quick Relish for *Fame* is observed to be a Weakness almost inseparable from *great Minds*: Not but that *little Minds* may have their Tincture of it too; which, whilst it pushes them forward to appear *considerable*, often renders them but the more conspicuously *contemptible*. This *Passion for Applause* then may be indulged to a Degree, that entirely frustrates the End of it; may ruin the Reputation it would raise; and prompt a Man to the most extravagant Enterprizes, only to perpetuate his Name, though it be with a Brand of Infamy.

And though your Productions, *Gentlemen*, which are mostly *Anonymous*, may seem to vindicate you from the Imputation of any such *Ambition*; yet how far the Vanity of being considered as a *first-rate* and *distinguished Genius* in the Circle of your private Acquaintance and Friends, who are let into the Secret, may contribute

bute to the Birth of such Productions, may deserve your particular Recollection. And if *this* be found at Bottom to be your *main Motive* in your several animated Attacks upon *Christianity*, permit me to say, that this ill-judged Application of your Talents, in the Esteem of wise and sober Men, *exposes* rather than *exalts* your Character, and *degrades* rather than *dignifies* your Genius; which might shine with greater Advantage, and be employ'd with more Safety and Service, both to yourselves and the Publick, another Way.

Give me Leave then to ask you, *Gentlemen*, in the next Place,

QUERY II.

Did you ever seriously consider, what it is that you really drive at, how far you mean to go, and what is the End you would gain?

Is it not to *subvert Christianity*, and *establish* some *better Scheme of Religion* in the Room of it? But did you ever well consider the immense Difficulty of such a Task? Which before you can accomplish,

You must *first* prove *Christianity* to be a *downright Forgery*, and a gross Im-
B position

position on the Consciences and Understandings of Men. For, please to remember, *Gentlemen*, unless you can do this, you do nothing. *Jesus of Nazareth*, you know, assumed the Character of a *Divine Prophet*, and declared, without Reserve, again and again, that he was a *Teacher sent of G O D*.—*I am not come of myself*, (saith he) *but He that sent me is true*^a.—*I proceeded forth and came from G O D*; *neither came I of myself, but He sent me*^b.—*I have not spoken of my self; but the Father which sent me, He gave me a Commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak*:—*Whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak*^c.—*My Doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me*^d.—Now since *Jesus Christ* made so many publick and positive Declarations, that he was *sent of G O D*, and that he taught and delivered nothing to the World, but what he *received from G O D*; it must follow, that either the *Doctrines* he taught were truly *Divine*, or *he himself* was a *Deceiver*, in so often affirming that he *received them from G O D*, when he did not; *i. e.* He must be either a *true Prophet*, or a *vile Impostor*: For the Case here will admit of *no Medium*.

We

^a John vii. 28. ^b John viii. 42. ^c John xii. 49, 50.
^d John vii. 16.

We *Christians* readily believe the *former Part* of the *Alternative*, for Reasons that are very satisfactory to us. But it is the *latter*, Gentlemen, that you seem to maintain: Nay, which you *must maintain*, if you are consistent with yourselves. For it is a Matter worth your Consideration, therefore give me leave to repeat it:
“ *There can be no Medium: Jesus Christ*
“ *must either have been a true Prophet sent*
“ *of GOD; or a bold Impostor who came*
“ *of himself, declaring he was sent of*
“ *GOD, when he was not.*”

This *latter Proposition* I apprehend is a little too hard to be relished by the more modest Disciples in the Cause of *Infidelity*; and perhaps is a Rock, they were little aware they should be driven upon. “ They
“ would willingly allow *Jesus* the Cha-
“ racter of a *moral Philosopher*, a wise and
“ worthy Man, who delivered some very
“ good Maxims of Virtue to the *Jews*,
“ with a Freedom which their corrupt
“ Lives and Principles rendered them un-
“ able to bear; and which, therefore,
“ drew upon him their utmost Hatred
“ and Malice. They will allow him the
“ Authority of a *Seneca*, or a *Plutarch*,
“ and are ready to pay the same Deference
“ to his Dictates and Doctrines, as to
“ theirs. Nay, they acknowledge the
B 2 “ *immortal*

“ *immortal and unrivalled Glory of the*
 “ *Christian Prophet, and that he hath*
 “ *given the best Account of the Attributes*
 “ *and Will of GOD, of any other Prophet*
 “ *or Lawgiver in the World; that he hath*
 “ *stated more clearly the several Duties*
 “ *and Obligations of Moral Truth and*
 “ *Righteousness, and enforced them with*
 “ *stronger Motives, and encouraged them*
 “ *with Promises of more effectual Aids and*
 “ *Assistances, than had ever been done by*
 “ *any other Prophet, Moralist, or Law-*
 “ *giver in Religion* *. But for the *Indis-*
 “ *pensible Obligation of all his Doctrines,*
 “ *or that he was immediately commission'd*
 “ *by GOD himself to introduce a Divine*
 “ *Revelation, or a New Religion into the*
 “ *World; this they desire to be excus'd*
 “ *giving their Assent to, till they have*
 “ *better Evidence.*” — But, alas! this
 will not do. They cannot be excus'd *giv-*
ing their Assent to this, unless they give
 their Assent to the *other Part* of the *Pro-*
position: For, as the Case stands, it plain-
 ly appears, that *Jesus Christ* must either
 be a *notorious Deceiver*, or a *true Prophet*:
 He must either *come of himself*, or *from*
 GOD. For his declaring that He *came*
from GOD, if he did not, destroys the
 Character of a *wise, worthy, just, and*
moral

* See *Moral Philos.* pag. 167, 392, 411.

moral Man. His *Doctrine*, therefore, must be either a *complicated Imposture*, or a *Divine Revelation*.

So, that, Sirs, if you know what you are about, and would do any thing to Purpose, in your Attempts to *set aside the Christian Revelation*, and the Obligations of it, your *first Business* is to prove, that *Jesus Christ* was *not sent of G O D*, (as He said he was,) but *came of his own Head*; that He was an *Impostor*, and his pretended Mission a *Delusion*. Till you prove this, you do nothing. Till you prove this, and very plainly and clearly prove it, with Arguments superior to any that can be urged to the contrary, the *other Part* of the *Proposition* must remain in its full Force; viz. that *He was*, (what He pretended and declared himself to be,) a *Teacher sent of G O D*; and consequently his *Doctrine Divine*.

But suppose you could thus *set aside the Christian Revelation*, you have done but half your Work. Your next Business will be to *find out a better System*, or *Scheme of Religion*, to substitute in the Room of it. And as it is much easier to pull down than to build up, herein, perhaps, you may meet with more Difficulty than you apprehend.

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It is easy enough to imagine, that the Superstructure you mean to raise on the Ruins of *Christianity*, is *the Religion of Nature*; and that you intend to take your *Moral System* from the Writings of the *New Testament*; which you allow to contain a very compleat Collection of all *Moral Precepts*; that is, that *the Religion of Nature* is no where better delineated than in the *Doctrines and Institutions of Him*, whom you must look upon as an *Impostor*.

But now, why is the *Religion of Morality* better than that of *Christianity*; when the whole of *Moral Religion* is included in the *Christian*, and is Part of it? The most that can be said then is, that *Christianity* is *no better* than *Morality*. If it be *as good* then, why all these mighty Efforts to *overthrow it*? and upon its Ruins to raise *another System*, which is confessedly *no better*; nay, *only Part of the same*? And when *that Part* of it which you retrench, (in the Opinion of those who are best able to judge of both,) adds a manifest Beauty and Excellence to *that* which you retain; not only as it makes a further Discovery of the Extent of Man's Duty and Happiness; but enforces the *Precepts of Morality* with *Sanctions* and
Motives,

Motives, and exhibits a Power to practise them, unknown to the Religion of Nature.

So that, *Gentlemen*, the Thing you aim at is, to set up *the Religion of Nature*, or *Morality*, in the Room of, and in Opposition to, *that of Christianity*; that is, to set up *a Part* in Opposition to *the Whole*, and prove it to be much better; forming *your moral Scheme* upon *that of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*; who, you confess, hath deliver'd a most admirable One; but whom, in every thing else He taught, you will prove to be *an Impostor*: An Enterprize, which, if I mistake not, will require all the Strength of your Genius, and the utmost Stretch of your Abilities, however superior they may be to those of the Rest of Mankind.

But let me further ask you, *Gentlemen*, and be so good as to let us know in plain Terms,

QUERY III.

What is your grand Objection against that Part of Christianity, which pretends to the Authority of pure Revelation? Or, What is the real Foundation of all your Dislike to it?

For whatever Share *Vanity*, or an *Ambition* of appearing *wiser than others*, may have

have in putting you upon such repeated and vigorous Endeavours to subvert it; there seems to be a *secret Disgust* which you have some Way or other taken against it, that must be suppos'd to be a *prior Motive* to those Attempts. *This* does not seem to be owing to what you generally pretend, viz. the *Want of sufficient Evidence*; for this Reason, *Because* you never yet have fairly collected *all the Evidences of Christianity*, both its *External* and *Internal*, and set them in that full and impartial Light, in which *its Advocates* have presented them to you, in order to encounter them in all their Force. This you have ever cautiously avoided, as diffident of your Equality to such an Encounter. The *true Reason*, then, of your *Disaffection* to the *Christian Revelation*, must be *something else*. And if we may be permitted to guess by what you have often intimated, we will suppose it to be the *Abstruseness* or *Obscurity* of some of its *Doctrines*, which in your Eye appear, not only *incomprehensible* and *mysterious*, but *inconsistent* and *absurd*.

But wherein do the *Doctrines* of the *Christian Revelation* appear so *absurd*? You have too much Ingenuity and Judgment to charge to the Account of *Christianity* all the *ridiculous Notions*, that have been

been ever maintain'd by those that bear the Name of *Christians*. You will not call all the extravagant and wild *Reveries* of *Superstition* and *Enthusiasm*, the *Doctrines* of *Christianity*. No; but you say, Take them as they lie in the *New Testament*, and you know not what to make of them.

—But may not this possibly be *your own Fault*? Are you sure you read the *Bible* without *Prejudice*, with a proper Allowance for the *Disadvantage* of its being a *Translation* from a dead and difficult Language; the *Language* of the *Orientals*; whose *Forms of Speech*, and *Manners of Life*, were so widely different from those of the *Europeans*? Have you endeavoured to furnish yourself with a competent Knowledge of its *peculiar Idioms*, and of the *Customs* of those People whose *History* it contains? Do you observe to take it in the *Connection* and *Analogy* of its several Parts; and give it leave to *interpret* and *explain itself*? And, in short, *study it* with that Diligence, Impartiality, and Candour, you would any other difficult *Author* of approv'd Antiquity? Were this the Case, I am satisfied you would not be so forward to lay *Inconsistency* and *Absurdity* to the Charge of *Scripture*. And if you do not *thus study it*, and take care to *understand it aright*, you would do

well to consider, that whilst you are exposing the *seeming Absurdities of Scripture*, you do but expose *your own real Ignorance*.

But suppose you cannot get over the *Difficulties* with which *some of its Doctrines* are attended, is that a just and sufficient Reason to *discard all the Rest*; even those you *do understand*, and have no Objection against? Are you resolved to *understand all*, before you *believe any*; and to reject *the Whole*, for the Sake of *two or three Doctrines*, against which your *only Objection* is, *that you do not understand them*? Which is in effect to say, that they *may be true*, for ought you know: For you will hardly be so sanguine as to affirm, that nothing *can be true*, but what *you understand*.

No Man, to be sure, is bound to *believe* self-evident *Contradictions*; even though they may come recommended by the pretended *Authority* of an infallible *Revelation*: Because it is not possible he should have so great an *Assurance*, that *that Revelation* is *true*, as he hath that such *self-contradictory Principles* are *false*. But as no one hath yet attempted to prove, that the *Doctrines of Christianity*, fairly stated from *Scripture*, are of this Nature, however *obscure* or *incomprehensible* some few of them may be; the Case then amounts

to

to this: That because *some few* of its *Doctrines* are too *sublime* for the present Reach of *Human Reason*, therefore the *Whole* of them are to be rejected as a *counterfeit Revelation*.

Is it *essential* then to a *Divine Revelation*, that *all the Doctrines* it reveals should be *proportion'd* to the *present Comprehension* of all those, to whom *that Revelation* is made? Nay, in Case God was to make a *real Revelation* to Men, is it not reasonable to suppose, on the contrary, that it must contain *some Things* in it, which they *cannot yet perfectly comprehend*, by Reason of the *Darkness and Disorder* the Human Faculties are in at present? Doth not a pure *Revelation* imply a Discovery of *some Truths*, which could not be learnt by the *Light of Nature*; and which, therefore, as the *Reason* of Mankind could not *discover* of itself, so it may not be able thoroughly to *comprehend* them when discovered? Is the *Sublimity* of any *Doctrine*, merely in itself consider'd, a conclusive Argument against the *Divinity* of it? Or your saying, that you do not see *how it can be true*, an infallible Proof that *it is not*? How then can the *Darkness and Difficulty* of *some few Doctrines* in the *Christian Revelation*, be a sufficient Reason for rejecting the *Whole* of *that Revelation*,

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lation, when it does not appear a fit and
justifiable Reason absolutely for rejecting
even those Doctrines themselves?——But
let me ask you, Gentlemen, after all,

QUERY IV.

Are you sincerely determined to stand or
fall by the Morality of the Gospel?

Are you indeed resolv'd to *form your*
Lives and Tempers by it, and to *live up*
to the *Precepts and Obligations* of it; to
govern all your Passions in that absolute
Manner it requires; to *renounce all known*
Sin even in the Thought; to *do to others*
that which you would *they should do to you*
upon a supposed Change of Circumstances;
to *avoid all Appearances of Evil*; to cul-
tivate a *Spirit of Meekness, Moderation,*
and *Charity*; to give up yourselves to *Piety*
and *Prayer*; to *forgive and love your Ene-*
mies, and to *do good to them that hate you?*
Do not *such Precepts* seem a little too
severe? And whatever may have been sup-
posed in the *former Query*, as to your
pretended *Veneration* for the *Morality of*
the Gospel, it deserves your serious Exami-
nation, whether your *original and main*
Objection against *Christianity* does not take
its Rise rather from the *Strictness of its*
Obligations

Obligations, than the *Abstruseness* of its *Doctrines*.

It is an easy Matter, no doubt, for a Man to *live up* to a *Religion* of his *own making*. And, indeed, it is but too justly suspected, that your grand and governing *Aim* in exerting yourselves so indefatigably to *subvert* the *Christian Institution* is, to get rid of the *Strictness* of its *Moral Precepts*; and that you may be at Liberty to mould and model what you call *the Religion of Nature*, and which you propose to set up in its stead, in such a Manner, as best suits your particular Tastes and Dispositions. For as *the Religion of Nature* is nothing but *the Religion of Reason*, it will be natural for you to set up your *own Reason* as the Standard; which, if bias'd (as it possibly may be,) by some *constitutional Vices*, will not fail to determine too much *in Favour* of *those Vices*, in the Scheme it shall form of *Natural Religion*: The Consequence of which will be, that you may keep *your Sins* and *your Religion* together, which upon the Scheme of the *Gospel-Religion*, it is impossible to do.

Excuse me, *Gentlemen*, if this bears a little too hard upon your *Character* as *Moral Deists*. It is not what I assert: But what is shrewdly *suspected* by some;
and

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and what deserves your sober and impartial Research. And the *Suspicion*, it must be own'd, receives Weight from this further Consideration, That if you had *that high Veneration* for the *Moral Precepts* of *Christianity* which you profess, you would think yourselves oblig'd to *live up* to them; which if you sincerely desir'd and endeavour'd, you would be so far *disposed in Favour* of the *Doctrines* of it, (with which they are so closely connected,) that you could never conclude *Jesus Christ* to be an *Impostor* for publishing them: Nay, were you heartily *resolv'd* to *live up* to the *Obligations* of *Moral Religion*, as contain'd in the *Gospel*, you would soon be *convinc'd* of the Beauty, Power, and Excellence of *those Principles* it recommends, as necessary to enforce *that Practice* it requires.

QUERY V.

Supposing a real Revelation were to come from GOD, to supply the Defects of Natural Religion, to remove the Prejudices, and assist the Reasonings of Mankind, with regard to the proper Perfection and Happiness of their Nature, and to be a certain Guide to it; (and such a Thing, you must own, is possible: Supposing it Fact then,

then, I say,) *In what Manner would you expect that such a Revelation from Heaven should be communicated to Man, or introduc'd into the World? What would you wish to be the Substance of it? And how would you desire to have it attested and confirm'd?*

Let us attend to these *Three Things* distinctly.

1. *Supposing a real Revelation were to come from GOD, in what Manner, think you, would it be proper that it should be made or communicated to Man?*

Doubtless you would expect, it should be made (that is, *made known*) to the World, in such a Manner, as is most agreeable to the establish'd Order of Things, and to the usual Methods of GOD's Dispensations towards his Creatures; and at the same Time, as would be most conducive to answer the great Ends and Designs of such a Revelation. — Now there are *Four Ways*, in which it may be communicated, viz.

(1.) This might be done by the *Ministration of Angels*; attended with unusual *Phænomena* in the Air, an audible *Voice from Heaven*, and all that terrifying *Pomp of Miracles* we read of in the Promulgation

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tion of *the Law* from Mount Sinai ; with an *express Command*, that what was then heard should be faithfully *recorded*, for the Benefit and Instruction of future Generations. Or,

(2.) GOD might make known his Will by *particular Inspirations* : I mean, by communicating it in an immediate and extraordinary Manner, by a *Divine* and *irresistible Impulse* on the Mind of every particular Person : For, doubtless, the *Maker* of the *Human Mind* can *affect* and *influence it* in what Manner he pleaseth, and by an *immediate Illumination* produce the most *effectual Conviction*. Or,

(3.) By *raising up* in every Age a *competent Number of Persons* thus *Divinely inspired*, to teach the rest of Mankind what *They* were immediately *taught of GOD* ; which was an usual Method under the *Jewish Dispensation*. Or,

(4.) By *sending an extraordinary Person* into the World under an *extraordinary Character* ; not only as a *Prophet*, but something *more than a Prophet* ; who, tho' the *Dignity* of his *Embassy* requir'd that he should be *more than Man*, should, notwithstanding, for the Benefit of a more free and familiar *Converse* with Men, *assume*, and appear in *their Form* and *Nature* ; who should *attest* his *Divine Mission*,

son, not only by the perfect *Innocence* of his *Life*, and the *Purity* of his *Doctrine*, but by the *Gifts* of *Prophecy* and *Miracles*, whereby he should be enabled to *speak* and *act*, as no Man before him ever did; who should *open his Commission* thus ratified and attested, and publicly *declare* to the World, that he was *sent* as an *extraordinary Messenger* from *G O D*, to make a *New Revelation* of his Will to Mankind; who should *deliver the Doctrines* He was sent to teach, with a *Plainness* and *Simplicity* becoming the Importance of them; and finally, should *seal them with his Death*, and *devolve* upon his first *Followers* and *Disciples* the same *extraordinary Gifts* of *Prophecy* and *Miracles*, which he had received himself, to enable them to *publish the Doctrines* He taught throughout the World, and *commit them to Writing* as a *standing Revelation*, or Record of *Divine Truths*, for the Benefit of future Ages.

Now it is well known, that in this Manner the *Christian Revelation* was ushered into, and established in the World. And how far *this Manner* of its being conveyed or communicated to Men, is *preferable* to the *other Three* before mentioned, I need not stay particularly to shew. At first View it appears to be the least

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Deviation from the natural and settled Order of Things; to be best suited to the Design of a *general and standing Revelation*, and adapted to render the important Purposes of it most effectual. So that no reasonable *Objection* can be conceived to lie against the *Revelation of the Gospel* from the *Method of its Promulgation*. Again,

2. *Supposing that an immediate Revelation were really to be given by GOD to Men, What are the Advantages you would expect from it? Or what could you wish or desire should be the Substance of it?*

Would it not be reasonable to expect,

(1.) That *such a Revelation* should have for its *Basis* the *Religion of Nature*? That it should give it the most *exquisite Touches*, its *last Finishing*; and carry it to the *highest Degree* of Improvement? That it should establish and enforce all the *Obligations of Morality*, and confirm the great and important *Principles* of it; particularly, *that fundamental One*, relating to the Existence, Nature, and Perfections of the *Divine Being*? And that it should distinctly open and urge the *various Duties and Devoirs of Man*, arising from the respective Relations he stands in, both to his *Creator*, and his *Fellow-Creatures*; or considered, both

as an *Inhabitant of this World*, and an *Expectant of a better?*

(2.) Would you not *hope* to have the great *Doctrine* of the *Immortality* of Human Souls, and that of a *Future State* of Existence, rescued from the Darkness and Uncertainty of *Philosophy*, and set in the strongest and most convincing Light?

(3.) Would you not *expect* to see the *Duties* and *Precepts* it enjoins, the *Aids* and *Blessings* it promises, the *Sanctions* and *Encouragements* it proposes, all suitably adapted to the *present State* and Exigence of *Human Nature*; such as a *Revelation* designed for the Comfort and Benefit of Mankind *in their present State*, must be supposed to contain? and to find the *Exhortations*, *Arguments*, and *Motives* addressed to them, not as *perfect Creatures*, but as Creatures under an *unnatural Disorder* and *Imbecillity* in the State and Powers of their Mind? For that the Mind of Man is not *now* in the State it *originally* was, but under the Power of a *sad Depravity*, is, I suppose, what you will not deny; it having been long ago confess'd by *Plato*, and other diligent *Researchers* into the State of *Human Nature* *.

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(4.) Would

* See *Stillingfleet's Origines Sacrae*, Book III. Chap. iii. Pag. 487, & seq.

(4.) Would you not likewise *be glad* to be *certainly inform'd* of the *true Origin* and *Source* of *that Depravity*? Whence it was that so much *Natural* and *Moral Evil* at first crept into the Creation of *God*, and render'd this Part of it such a Scene of Folly, Madness, and Misery?

(5.) Would you not *be glad* to see a *Remedy* propos'd *adequate* to this *universal Disease*, suited to the Nature and Circumstances of it, and proportioned to the Weakness of the *Patient*? Or a certain and infallible *Method prescrib'd*, by which the *Human Nature* may be meliorated, rectified, and restor'd to its proper Strength, Beauty, and Felicity? And,

(6.) Were *this Revelation* to contain *nothing* but what might be learnt from *the Light of Nature*, who does not see, that *this* would be a very just and material *Exception* against its Authority? For if it taught us *no more* than what we *knew*, or *might know* without it, what *Occasion* were there *for it*? and how would it *answer* the proper *Design* of *a Revelation*? Another requisite *Character* then of *a Divine Revelation* is, that it contain some Things, which Men *did not*, and *could not* know without it, but which however are very *necessary to be known*.

Now

Now I dare appeal to you, *Gentlemen*, whether *Christianity*, as it lies in the *Gospel*, and is understood by all the most sober and judicious *Christians*, does not contain all these *Requisites* and *Characters* of a *Divine Revelation*?—Hath it not given the last and most exquisite *Touches* to the *Law of Nature*? Hath it not brought *Life* and *Immortality to Light*? Does it not discover the *Source* of those sad and deplorable *Disorders*, the *Human Nature* at present lies under? And does it not discover the proper *Remedy* for them; a *Remedy* every way *proportioned* to the *Nature* of the *Disease*, and the *Circumstances* of the *Patient*; in the *Mediation of the Son of GOD*, and the *Grace and Ministry of the Spirit*? And could either the *Cause* or *Cure* of this *universal Malady* be ever found out by the *Light of Nature*? So that upon the whole, does not the *Christian Revelation* contain in it every *Thing*, which it would be reasonable to expect, a real *Revelation* coming from *GOD* should? But,

3. In what *Manner* would you have such a *Revelation* attested? Or by what *Kind* of *Testimony*, or *Credentials*, would you expect to have it confirm'd?

Besides

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Besides the fore-mention'd *Internal Evidence* of it, in its affording such a manifest *Discovery* of important *Truths* and *Facts*, as is every way *worthy* of the great *GOD* to make, and being exactly *suit'd* to the *Necessities* and *Circumstances* of his *Creatures* to whom it is made ; would you not *expect*, that it should be *confirm'd* by some *External Proofs*, as necessary to *procure Credit* to its *Authority* ; especially with *vulgar Minds*, which are not so apt to be *convinc'd* purely by the *Evidence* of its *Intrinsick Excellence* and *Perfection* ?

But now, by what *External Proofs* would you have the *Truth* and *Divinity* of such a *Revelation* ascertain'd ? Can you imagine any *more likely* to awaken the *Attention* and *Consideration* of Men in general, and consequently *more proper* for the *Purpose*, than *Prophecy*, and *Miracles* ?

Would it not appear fit and desirable, that *GOD* should *prepare the Way* for the *Reception* of such a *Revelation*, by giving frequent *Intimations* of it to the *World* *before it came* ? That by the *Gift of Inspiration* he should enable Persons, in different *Ages* and *Periods* of the *World*, to *foretell* it, and to *describe the Person* who should be the *Messenger* of it to Men ; the *Time* when He should appear ; his *Character*

rafter and Actions; and the Treatment he should meet with from the World? Would you not expect, that this Divine Messenger himself should be invested also with this Prophetick Gift and Character; so as to be able to foretell, in a plain and circumstantial Manner, several important Future Events, relating to his own Death; the Opposition his New Religion should meet with afterwards; the Condition of those that should have Courage enough to espouse and propagate it, and the Fate of those that should have the Obstinacy finally to reject it? And that the same Gift of Inspiration and Prophecy should devolve upon Those, whom he should depute to preach and spread his Doctrines in the World, after he left it? And would not the punctual Accomplishment of all these Prophecies relating to this New Revelation, deliver'd both before, at, and after its first Promulgation, be a wonderful and undeniable Attestation to the Divine Authority of it?

But beside this, would it not be natural to expect, that the Messenger of it should be endow'd with a Power of working Miracles, for the further Confirmation of his Divine Mission; to prove that He really was what he pretended to be, an extraordinary Prophet and Teacher c
o G O D,

GOD, to instruct Mankind in a *New Religion*, and make known to them some Truths of great Importance before unknown? And that the *Miracles* to be wrought for this Purpose should be so numerous and popular, so *beneficent* and *uncontested*, as none wrought before them ever were? And that *They*, who should be appointed to *propagate* this *New Institution* after him, should be *impower'd* to work the same Kind of *Miracles* for the Confirmation of it several Ages afterwards? And finally, that the *Success* of it in the World should be *answerable* to its Divine Dignity and Original; should bear down all Opposition before it; should overcome the Carnal Interests and Prejudices of Mankind; and suddenly diffuse its Heavenly Influence and Power, almost to every Corner of the Earth?

Now, I say, were the great *GOD* to make an *immediate Revelation* of his Will to his Creatures, would it not be *expected*, that it should be *made appear* to be so, or that the *Divine Authority* of it should be *attested* and *confirmed*, in some *such Manner as this*? And indeed, what greater *External Evidence* can there be of a *Divine Revelation*, than *this* is?

And is not *all this* the *Evidence* now, by which the *Gospel-Revelation* is *confirmed*?

ed? — Was it not foretold, that the *Messiah* should come, many Ages before he did? Was not the *Time of his Coming* punctually prefix'd in *Prophecy*? Did not *Jesus Christ* come precisely at that Time; and in his Character, Actions, Life, and Sufferings, answer to the general and true Sense and Construction of those *Prophecies*, tho' they were mistaken by some, for whose Benefit they were immediately intended? Did He not in many Instances discover a perfect *Knowledge of the Hearts of Men*? and shew a very comprehensive *Insight into Futurity*; by foretelling, the Manner and Circumstances of his own *Death*; his *Resurrection on the third Day*; his *Ascension into Heaven*; the *Descent of the Spirit* upon his Disciples; and particularly, the *Destruction of Jerusalem*, in so circumstantial a Manner, as perhaps no Event was ever pointed out in *Prophecy*? And had not many of his *Disciples* after him the same *Spirit of Prophecy*? Were not all these *Prophecies* plainly and punctually fulfilled? And are we not assured of all this, as far as the Truth of *History* may be depended upon; and as far as we can be of any *Facts* so long since past?

And as for *Miracles*, where do we read of any like those that were wrought by

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Jesus

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Jesus Christ in Confirmation of his *Divine Mission*, both for the *Nature, Number,* and *Witnesses* of them? And were not *the like Miracles* occasionally wrought for the same Purpose by his succeeding *Disciples* for near 300 Years afterwards; till the Increase and Advancement of Human Learning among *Christians*, and the Ceasing of Persecutions superseded their Continuance? And finally, Did not *this Gospel* make a most sudden, rapid, and extensive *Progress*, almost throughout all the Parts of the known World, notwithstanding all the Idolatry, Ignorance, Malice and Prejudice of Men, of *different Interests* and *Religions*, that stood in its Way?

Now, upon the whole, if there be any other Way, in which a *Divine Revelation* can be suppos'd to be *better evidenced* and *attested*, let it be shewn what it is. But if, upon Recollection, you can think of *no better Way*; but are oblig'd to own, that a *Revelation* coming from *G O D*, must bring some *such Credentials* along with it, then how strong is the Argument in Favour of the *Christian Revelation*; that it comes actually confirmed in *that Manner*, which you are forced to confess is *the only Way*, by which a *Divine Revelation* can be known to be so? The Consequence of which is, that if *Christianity* be not a *true*
and

and *Divine Revelation*, it is impossible to know that any one is.

But further, *Gentlemen*, I would beseech you to consider,

QUERY VI.

Whether the Manner, in which you have conducted your Opposition to the Christian Revelation, be altogether becoming the Seriousness and Solemnity of the Subject?

For is it not notorious, that many of you have *treated Things*, which you know are esteemed *Sacred* by others, in a Way so *droll* and *ludicrous*, as if your only Design was to *make yourselves merry*, and gain the *Laugh on your Side*? But how far *Decency* and *good Manners* will bear you out, in treating the *Religion of your Country*, (which, at least, has the most plausible Marks of *Divinity* of any Religion in the World,) with so much *Indignity* and *Contempt*, you would do well to consider.

Review, I beseech you, *the Manner* in which the *Controversy* hath been carried on *between you* and the *Christians*. Hath it not been with *Sneer* and *Flirt*, and affected Strokes of *Smartness* and *Satyr*, on

the *one Side*; and with *plain Reasoning*, *cool Argument*, *Facts*, and *solid Testimony* on the *other*? Was *Truth* ever defended, or supported, the *former Way*; or *Error*, the *latter*? Are not the *Advocates* for the *worst Cause* generally the most noisy, confident, and blustering? *Cowardise* and *Falshood* require those Arts, to give them Countenance, and to impose on the Weak and Credulous: *Truth* and *Virtue* need them not, nor use them.

Would you not be ashamed to treat any *other Scheme* of Notions, whether *Physical* or *Philosophical*, in the same Manner? And is not this Debate of the utmost Importance?—At least then, let it be handled with *common Decency*. — How can I think that Man *in Earnest*, or *in his Wits*, that does nothing but *laugh* and *make Faces*, while he pretends to be convincing me of the most *dangerous* and the most *fatal Mistake* in the World? Why then, when we come expecting to find Accuracy and Solidity of Argument, are we perpetually put off with *Burlesque*, *Banter*, and *Buffoonery*; while you labour to make that *appear ridiculous*, which you can never *prove so*; and *flee* at what you cannot *confute*?—An approved Sign in all other Cases, of a *bad Cause*, or a *bad Head* to defend a *good One*.

Would

Would any *Moral Philosopher* in the World but *yours*, treat even a *moral Subject* with mere *Merriment* and *Laughter*? And when he invites People to come and hear sound Sense and solid Argument, put them off with *Grimace* and *Raillery*; fall to *Raving*, instead of *Reasoning*; and suffer the *insolent Ranter* to make a Fool of the *Moral Philosopher*?

That Writer was, to be sure, very unhappy in *the Title* he chose to prefix to his Performance; as I cannot but think most of the *Authors of this Stamp* are, unless it be done *with Design*: And then it is much the same Artifice, as hanging forth a *proud and pompous Sign* without, to entice Passengers to stop, and taste the *muddy, poisonous Liquors* within. *The Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, was designed to shew, that *Christianity* was supported by *no sufficient Grounds or Reasons* at all. *Christianity not founded on Argument*, seems to imply the Author's Consciousness, that upon *that Foundation* it was *impregnable*; and that therefore, before it can be *overthrown*, it must be *set upon some other*. However, if it be *not founded on Argument*, it is much after all, that it should be *as old as the Creation*.

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It is very possible, you may look upon the Author of *Christianity not founded on Argument*, as a *First-rate Wit*, and his Production as a *Master-piece in its Kind*; (and it is to be hoped, that few will envy him the Honour of it :) But *what Notion* can you imagine a Man of sober Sense and Understanding would form of *that Piece*?—Is it indeed any thing more than one *perpetual Sneer*? A low Affectation to *ridicule* one *great Principle* of *Christianity*, by a *studied Misrepresentation* of it? and to expose it to *Contempt*, by presenting it in the most *unnatural* and *hideous Light*?—The Thing is writ, it must be own'd, with *Spirit* and *Vivacity*: But strip it of its *gay Plumes* that strike the Fancy, the Pomp of *Stile*, the Force of *Wit*, and the Arts of *Disguise*, that animate and embellish the Whole; and what remains, but the *weakest* and *wickedest Notion* that ever had the Honour to be supported by *Form of Argument*? Such as a *Child* “ in
“ the Impotence and Impuberty of a du-
“ tiful Understanding, in the tractable
“ Simplicity of unpractised Reason, and
“ with all the obsequious Submission and
“ humble Acquiescence of a Babe sitting
“ down to learn his Lesson *,” would dis-
dain

* See *Christianity not founded on Argument*, Pag. 75.

dain to own for *Argument*, much more to receive for *Truth*.

Whatever was the Author's *real Design* in meddling with such a Subject, *his Method of treating it*, I am sure, is sufficient to justify the *Suspensions* that are entertained of it; that it was only a *wanton and wicked Experiment*, to see how far the mere Force of *Wit* and *Language* would go, to *shock the Faith* of *Christians* by *ridiculing* it. For it requires the highest Degree of *Charity*, to think he is *so weak*, as to be *in earnest*, or to believe one Word of what he says.—However, most certain it is, “ that the *ludicrous Turn* he so often gives to *Scripture*, and the Air of *Burlesque* and *Irony* that runs through the whole Piece, neither suits the Character of a *rapturous Devotee*, so often affected, nor discovers a becoming Sense of the infinite Moment of the Question in Debate *.”

And is not this the Artillery you generally play off against the *Religion* of your Country? Which is not so much *Attack* as *Insult*, and shews rather your *Contempt* of it, than any *Hope* you really have of *overthrowing* it.

Gentlemen, *Christianity*, an Institution so benevolent, and so friendly to the Interests

* See *Doddridge's Answer*, Letter I. Pag. 7.

terests of Human Nature, *deserves better Treatment* at your Hands.

You may, if you please, plead for the Liberty of *Burlesque* and *Humour* on grave Subjects, and quaintly tell us, that “*that* “ which will not bear *Raillery*, is *suspicious* *;” that “*Truth*, ’tis supposed, “ will bear *all Lights*; and one of those “ principal Lights, and natural Mediums, “ by which Things are to be viewed, in “ order to a thorough Recognition, is “ *Ridicule* itself †;” that is, provided it be not *gross*, but *refined* and *genteel* ‡: Which in plain Language is, *Religion* and the most *Sacred* Things in Nature may be *laugh’d at*; and every one, provided he have but *Wit* enough, is at Liberty to *expose* it, and make it look as *ridiculous* as he can. And if it does not bear *this Test*, (that is to say, if it *appear ridiculous*, when it is *represented* so by being artfully disguised, and dressed up in false Colours,) it is to be looked upon as *suspicious*. As if the *parti-colour’d Coat* might not be put upon *any Back*: Or, as if any Thing in Nature, though of the most acknowledged Truth and Sanctity, was incapable of being *misrepresented* and *abused*; or when set in a *grotesque* and *ridiculous* Light,

* See Lord Shaftsbury’s *Characteristicks*, Vol. I. Pag. 74. † *Ibid.* Pag. 61. ‡ *Ibid.* Pag. 63.

Light, would not appear *Grotesque* and *Ridiculous*.

By the Leave of this *Noble Author* I must enter my Dissent here, and affirm, that *Burlesque* and *Banter* is so far from being a *natural Medium*, that it is the *falsest Medium* Truth can be represented in; that in Point of common Decency, grave and solemn Subjects should be treated in a grave and solemn Manner; and that *Ridicule* should never be practised, but upon Subjects plainly *Ridiculous in themselves*; and not upon those, which are capable of being made appear so by *Humour* and *false Colouring*: For then, nothing would be exempt; since every Thing may be made to appear *Ridiculous*, and, consequently, every Thing must be *Suspicious*.

Besides, how must we distinguish between that *Gross Raillery*, which is debarred from this Privilege, and that *Genteel* and *Refined Raillery* which is allowed it? Since every one of a profane and sprightly Turn of Mind will be apt to think, that his *Wit* and *Humour* are sufficiently refined, to intitle him to the *Privilege* of using them upon the most *Sacred Subjects*; which, though they bear the Test of the severest *Argument*, yet if they do not bear the Test of *Ridicule* too, (that is, if

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when

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when made ridiculous, they appear so,) they
are to be suspected. A Man must have a
very obsequious and dutiful Understanding
indeed, that can receive this as a just and
sober Principle of Reason.—But perhaps
the *Illustrious Author* is only trying the
Force of his refined Raillery, to ridicule
and disguise the common Principles of
Truth and Decency.

Gentlemen, the Religion of the Gospel
will not only bear all your Raillery, but
all your Rage too. However, it would
become you to consider, how low and
impotent such Kind of Efforts are; how
derogatory to your declared Character of
sober Enquirers, and unprejudiced Searchers
after Truth; and what Danger there is,
lest these Shafts of Wit and Ridicule, you
so plentifully throw against the *Christian*
Religion now, should rebound with greater
Force upon yourselves hereafter, and give
Wounds to your Consciences, which,
howsoever light you make of them at pre-
sent, you will have no Ability to bear.

QUERY VII.

*Is it not, at least, as possible, for Men
to be prejudiced against Christianity,
as for it?*

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Is it candid or equitable in you, to be continually throwing *all the Prejudice on our Side*? Is this *fair Debate*? Is it not rather the Mark of an *Impotent and Angry Adversary*, to tell his *Antagonist* to his Face, that what He imagines to be a steady *Adherence to Truth*, is nothing but an unreasonable *Stiffness in Error*? and that his inflexible Attachment to his Opinions proceeds, not from the Force of *Rational Conviction*, but from *blind Prejudice*? Is not *this* to imitate the Manner of the weakest and most impatient Disputants; who, when *exhausted of Argument*, fall to *calling of Names*; and *insult* the Adversary, they cannot *convince*? But this is really, *Gentlemen*, to debase your Character; and one would think, it should be *beneath* the Dignity of the most *refin'd Spirits*, to stoop to so *vulgar a Resource*.

Prejudice is the common *Frailty* of Human Nature; a total Freedom from which is an Immunity, we have not *Ignorance* or *Arrogance* enough to pretend to. But we think it *hard* to be told, that We are under the Government of *this Human Frailty*, more than any other Persons in the World; and *harder* still to be insulted, because we have our Difficulties in giving our Assent to the Truth of this Proposition, *that all the Prejudice lies on our*

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Side,

Side, and none at all on yours: Which, in Truth, is the Language of Bigotry, rather than Philosophy; and suits the Character of an Inquisitor, better than that of a Free-Thinker.

In short, Is it not as reasonable to suppose, that *you are prejudiced against Christianity*, as that *we are for it*? And is not *that* as likely to be the Spring of *your Opposition*, as *this* to be the Cause of *our Adherence* to it?—No, but “We have received *our Prejudices* with our *Education*: “They were *early*, and therefore *deeply fixed*; and the Shackles of *our youthful Institutions* are so strongly riveted, that “*we cannot get rid of them.*”——But pray now, Why is not this as possible for *us*, as it is for *you*, who, it is supposed, have done it? How know you, that *We* have not *examined*, and *re-examined*, the Principles and Impressions which we received from Education *in Favour of Christianity*, with as much Caution and Impartiality as *You* have *yours*? And if *We* think not fit, after your Example, to throw them all off by the Lump, is it not as *Reasonable*, and much more *Ingenuous*, to *impute this* to a full and rational *Conviction* of the *Justness* of those we retain, than to a *blind, perverse Attachment* to them?

Do you well consider, *Gentlemen*, what Room there is to *retort this Charge* with Vigour? And how many *more Things* there are, which are apt to *prejudice* the Minds of Men *against Christianity*, than *for it*? Do not *corrupt Habits* often throw a strong and imperceptible *Bias* on the Mind? How easily the *Understanding* is *misled* by predominant Appetites, and lawless Passions, every one knows.—Add to this, that the *Purity, Perfection, and Spirituality* of the *Christian Doctrines and Precepts*, are so *opposite and disgusting* to the *carnal Tastes and Tempers* of the Generality of Men, and give so strong a Check to their governing Vices; that it is so far from seeming *strange*, that such Persons should be *prejudiced against the Gospel*, that it would, indeed, be *wonderful if they were not*. And these *Kind of Prejudices*, which the corrupt *Lusts* of Men excite *against the Gospel*, as they are *more natural*, so they are usually *much stronger*, than those which *Education* plants in the Mind *in Favour of it*: As appears from hence; because the *former* often get the better of the *latter*; and the sober Impressions received in *Education* are frequently effaced, by the Force of criminal Pleasures, and the Power of Temptations, *in maturer Age*. So that, how Men that are under the Government

vernment of *Appetite* and *Passion*, should come to be *averse* to the *Strictness* and *Spirituality* of the *Gospel*, is *easy* to conceive. But how it comes to pass, that by far the greatest Part of Men should *retain* the *Impressions* they received in their Education in *Favour* of it, (notwithstanding its absolute Opposition to all their corrupt Dispositions and Appetites,) unless it be from the Force of *Truth* and *Conviction*, is *hard* to imagine.

For to speak the Truth freely, Men's *Love of Vice* often sets them a quarrelling with *Christianity*; and rather than part with *their Sins*, they will part with *their Religion*, and give no Quarter to *this*, because it will give no Countenance to *them*: They do not like the palpable *Inconsistency* there is, between the *Profession* of the one, and the *Practice* of the other. Especially if with a Propension to Dissoluteness of Manners, there be joined a tolerable *Genius* and *Vivacity of Spirit*, and a *Vanity* of appearing Wiser than others, the *Temptation* then grows stronger, to throw off the *Principles of Christianity*, and embrace *those of Infidelity*: Because this at once gratifies their Pride, and makes their Sins sit lighter on their Consciences; as the *inferred Obligations of Natural Religion* are
more

more easily evaded than the *express Ones of a Divine Revelation.*

This then, I say, makes it but *too justly suspected*, that they who *break through the Principles* which they received in their Education in *Favour of Christianity*, are therein actuated by a *Prejudice* arising from a *Distaste* to the strict Obligations of it: Or however, *this appears a more reasonable Supposition*, than that they who *retain their Attachment to it*, notwithstanding those strict Obligations, are *prejudiced* by a *blind Zeal for it*, though it have *no sufficient Evidence* to support it. For, give me Leave to say, that were the *Evidences of Christianity* indeed so *weak and insufficient*, as you affect to represent them, it is altogether *Incredible*, in the Midst of so much Wickedness and Corruption there is among Men, which it peremptorily condemns, it should have *half the Friends and Advocates* it hath; which shews the natural Force of Conscience, and *how hard it is for Reasonable Men*, though much depraved by Vice, to sacrifice their *Understanding* to their *Lusts*. And I have often thought, that notwithstanding the *Prevalence of Infidelity* at present, yet the *small Number* of those who are bold enough to *maintain the Principles* of it, is one of the strongest Arguments for the *Truth of Christi-*

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Christianity, and demonstrates the Weight
of its *Evidence*, in overpowering the cor-
rupt *Prejudices* of Men against it, and
even in Spite of *those Prejudices*, forcing
their Assent.

Thus, *Gentlemen*, you see how easily
the Charge of Prejudice may be *retorted*;
which, therefore, it is to be hoped, you
will be more sparing of for the Future.

QUERY VIII.

*Upon a Review of the Controversy be-
tween you and the Christians, do your
usual Methods of Attack appear Fair
and Honourable?*

Do not the *Arts* you make use of in
Defence of your Cause, rather seem to be-
tray your own *Consciousness of its Weakness*?
And while you are content to play your
small Artillery at the *Out-works of Christi-
anity*, do you not seem to look upon the
Fort, at which you keep at so great a
Distance, as *Impregnable*? Why else have
you not yet attempted to raise your Batte-
ries against the great Doctrine of *Christ's*
Resurrection from the Dead? on which
Foundation *Christianity* hath hitherto stood
unshaken. Nor can any Argument be
more to the Point. For if *Jesus Christ*
was

was actually and indeed *raised from the Dead on the third Day*, (as he foretold he should,) *by the Power of the Father*, as a Publick Declaration and Testimony of God's Acceptance of him; then He *must be* (what he always declared himself to be,) *a true Prophet* and Messenger sent from *G O D*; and, consequently, his Doctrine *Divine*, and his Religion *a true Revelation*.——And can you prove *this Fact* now, to be *a Forgery*? Or have you ever dared to attempt it? Yet give me Leave to say, Till you do this, you do nothing. Your Nibbling at *Prophecies*, and Caviling at some *obscure Passages* in the *Old Testament* relating to the *Messiah*, will be of no Advantage to your Cause, while *this main Argument*, on which the whole Controversy turns, lies in your Way; which will always remain *an Argument* infinitely more plain, strong, and conclusive *for Christianity*, than any *Objection* you may raise from *Prophecy* can be *against it*.

But though *this* be the *main Pillar* on which *Christianity* rests, (and is so far from being shaken, that it remains as yet unassaulted,) yet there are *several others* which contribute their joint Support. And this gives me an Opportunity of putting you in Mind of *another* *disingenuous Ar-*
G *tifice*

tifice you use in the Method of your *Attacks* upon *Christianity*; and that is, That of the *many substantial Arguments*, on all which, *collectively* taken, *Christianity* rests, as on so many solid Pillars, you affect to fix it *but upon One*, that you may with the more Ease throw it down.

Thus the Author of *The Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* allowed it but *one Argument* to stand upon, *viz. the Accomplishment of Prophecy*. This then at least ought to have been *fairly handled*, and to have had full Scope allow'd it. Whereas indeed "only a *few real Diffi-*
" *culties*, and every *Appearance of Diffi-*
" *culty*, are not only carefully laid toge-

"ther, but artfully represented and ag-
"gravated, and treated with *Levity* and
" *Ridicule*; while *all the Instances* of a
" *clear Accomplishment*, in a vast Variety of
" very obvious Circumstances, are wholly
" overlooked and pass'd by in Silence*."
—— Another places it in *Miracles*; and then labours to prove, that a *Miracle* cannot be a *proper Medium* of a *Rational Conviction*; or indeed is not, in the Nature of Things, a *proper and sufficient Proof* or *Evidence* of a *Divine Doctrine*.—— But lest, after all, *the Argument from Miracles* should

* See the *Preface* to Harris's *Practical Discourses on the Messiah*.

should seem to prove something, out comes *another*, who (that it may give them no more Trouble,) resolves to take it entirely out of the Way; by roundly asserting, that *Jesus Christ* wrought *no real Miracles* at all; and that all the Relations we have of that Nature in the *New Testament* are to be taken, not in a *Literal*, but a *Figurative Sense* *.——But when *he* had almost ruined the Cause by over-straining it, there came *another* very seasonably to his Assistance, who with a little more Modesty and Sobriety, very gravely tells us, that *if Christianity be true*, we are mistaken in expecting any great Benefit from it; for that it is, in reality, nothing but a *New Edition* of the *Law of Nature*; and that the Substance of it is *as Old as the Creation*.

And I cannot but think, it is a Compliment much too high to be paid to that *other Writer*, to set about *shaping* and *pruning* the *Religion of the Gospel* according to *his Model*; and, upon *his Command* and *Authority*, to strip it of its most Illustrious and Distinguishing Principles; or to *pare* and *contract* it so, as to circumscribe it within the Bounds of *those Sentences* and *Discourses* which were delivered by *Jesus Christ*

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* See *Woolston* on the *Miracles of Jesus Christ*.

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Christ himself, exclusive of those Doctrines which were preached by his Apostles and Disciples, who immediately succeeded him, and upon whom he promised to send, and actually did send, his Spirit of Inspiration, to be their Infallible Guide herein, and to lead them into all Truth.*

Another supposing the Advocates for Christianity to place the Evidence of it mostly in Faith, tells us, "that there can be no such Thing as a Divine Faith upon Human Testimony: It is a mere absurd Supposition; and the Laity will all immediately despise and laugh at what the Clergy have hitherto called Divine Faith †."—Till at length appears an Author, with as rich a Vein of Wit and Humour as any of the rest, who observing that the Advocates for Christianity have of late very plausibly maintained their Ground on the Foot of Reason and Argument, and imagining that they place it on that Footing only, endeavours with all the Force of Eloquence and Pomp of Language, to drive them from that Resource, and to prove that Christianity hath nothing at all to do with Reason, and can never stand upon that Bottom; that it is not founded on Ar-
gument,

* See Chubb's True Gospel &c. pag. 25, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47.

† See Moral Philosopher, Vol. I. pag. 84, 434.

gument, and rests only on the Basis of Faith; which Faith is the Effect of a *supernatural Influence*, an *infused Evidence*, or an *inspired Conviction*: So that, in short, nothing but the *uncontrolable Evidence* of *immediate Inspiration*, can give any Man a *full Satisfaction* of the *Truth* of it *.

If then *Christianity* cannot be *proved* to be a *Divine Revelation*, neither by the *Accomplishment of Prophecies*, nor the *Evidence of Miracles*; if neither *Faith* nor *Reason* can ascertain its *Divinity*, it hath *no Foundation* at all; at least *none* that we are able to comprehend or discern. But this is too much a great deal for any Man to take upon him to *assert*, or at least to *prove*, all at once. The *Adversaries* of it therefore, that they may not *shock* their Readers too much, generally assume the Character of *Advocates*; and when they take from it *one Foundation*, they take care to place it upon *another*; and leave it to their *Fellow-Labourers* that come after them in the same Cause, to remove it from *that*: That by taking from it *one Pillar* after *another*, they may at length *bring it to the Ground*: Not considering, or not willing to consider, that all this while they are *labouring in vain*. For
after

* See *Christianity not founded on Argument*, pag. 58. & *passim*.

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after all, if the Doctrine of *Christ's Resurrection* be true, He must have been a true *Prophet* and *Messenger of GOD*, and his Religion *Divine*; notwithstanding all their most subtile *Objections*, and most laboured Arguments to the contrary. And please to remember, *Gentlemen*, till you drive us from *this Hold*, the Triumph is on our Side and not yours: And it is a *Hold*, which the *weakest Christian* may maintain, and glory in, and where he may bid *Defiance* to the utmost Efforts of all your *Art* and *Sophistry*.—But yet again, let me beseech you, *Gentlemen*, to consider,

QUERY IX.

Whether you have well weighed the Principles you espouse, or thoroughly examined your own Creed?

For as great an *Aversion* as you express for *Forms of Faith*, you are not, I presume, such *absolute Unbelievers* as to have no Creed at all. And the *System of Principles* you adopt, (which I call your Creed,) and which the World is now pretty well acquainted with, (if I am not much mistaken,) is as hard to be digested by a free and impartial Understanding, as that of the *Christians*. Give me Leave therefore
to

to set it forth to View, together with the *Christians Creed*; that the *Difference* may appear in *Contrast*, and that *you yourselves* may judge by the Comparison, which of the Two, *the Christians*, or *You*, are the most *Implicit* and *Resolute Believers*.

THE DEIST'S CREED.

‘ **I** Believe, that the *Mind of Man* in all
‘ its Faculties and Powers of *Reason*,
‘ *Understanding*, *Will*, and *Affections*, is in
‘ so perfect and regular a *State*, so free
‘ from all corrupt *Biafs*, *Darkness*, and
‘ *Prejudice*, (notwithstanding all the gross
‘ Ignorance, Bigotry, and Wickedness
‘ there is in the World,) that it is fully
‘ sufficient to be *its own Guide* to *Duty*
‘ and *Happiness*: And therefore, that there
‘ is no *Need* of any *immediate Divine Re-*
‘ *velation* for its Direction, or of any *spe-*
‘ *cial* or *supernatural Influence* for its As-
‘ sistance.

‘ I Believe, that *Jesus Christ*, who is
‘ commonly said to be the *Founder of the*
‘ *Christian Scheme*, was no better than an
‘ *Impostor*: That though He often de-
‘ clared indeed, that he was *sent of GOD*,
‘ yet he really *was not*, but *came of him-*
‘ *self*; and made use of *that Deceit*, only
‘ to

‘ to impose upon the Superstition and
 ‘ Weakness of the credulous Multitude,
 ‘ and by the pretended Sanction of a Di-
 ‘ vine Authority, to gain the more Prose-
 ‘ lytes to his Doctrine.

‘ I Believe however, that *this Impostor*
 ‘ was an excellent Preacher of Moral
 ‘ Truth and Righteousness; that he refin’d
 ‘ upon the Pagan Ethicks, and carried
 ‘ the Religion of Nature to its utmost
 ‘ Improvement: But that he was mistaken
 ‘ in many Things relating to the Jewish
 ‘ Religion and Rites, which he thought to
 ‘ make subservient to his own Scheme;
 ‘ though otherwise a Man of great Wis-
 ‘ dom and Understanding.

‘ I Believe, that though he was a De-
 ‘ ceiver and Seducer, yet in all other Re-
 ‘ spects he was a Man of great Probity
 ‘ and Righteousness, of singular Benevo-
 ‘ lence, Sobriety, and Sanctity; and that
 ‘ he suffered very unjustly from his own
 ‘ Countrymen, who envied him for the
 ‘ Vertues which they could not imitate.

‘ I Believe, that the Historical Facts of
 ‘ the Gospel are not faithfully recorded, tho’
 ‘ I cannot disprove them: But that the
 ‘ Works of Philo, the Commentaries of Ju-
 ‘ lius Cæsar, and the History of Josephus,
 ‘ which were wrote about the same Time,
 ‘ may be safely credited, and depended
 upon

‘ upon as *Genuine*: Notwithstanding the
‘ usual *Marks* and *Criteria*, by which
‘ *Criticks* judge of the *Authenticallness* of
‘ any *antient Book*, belong to the *former*,
‘ as well as to *these latter*.——Or if the
‘ Writings of the *New Testament* be al-
‘ lowed to be as *Authentick an History* as
‘ any of the same Date now extant;
‘ yet

‘ I *Believe*, that the many *wonderful*
‘ *Things*, which *Jesus Christ* is there said
‘ to have done, were all *collusive*; and no
‘ more to be *credited* than those, which
‘ *Philostratus* relates concerning *Apollonius*
‘ *Thyanæus* in the First Century, whom
‘ *Hierocles the Philosopher* compared with
‘ *Jesus Christ*: That his boasted *Works*
‘ were mere *Feats of Art* and *Dexterity*,
‘ designed only to amuse or amaze the
‘ Multitude, and *not real Miracles*: And
‘ that, in short, it is possible for the *Blind*
‘ to be restored to *Sight*, *Cripples* to the
‘ Use of their *Limbs*, and the *Dead* to
‘ *Life*, *Instantly* and *with a Word*; and all
‘ *without a Miracle*.——Or else, all that
‘ is related of this Nature concerning him,
‘ may possibly not be *Fact*, but *Figure*;
‘ and though they are related as *Facts*,
‘ yet are they to be construed in a *Tropical*
‘ and *Allegorical Sense*, and to be applied
‘ to a *Spiritual Purpose* and Signification.

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——But

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‘ ———But supposing they were *real Facts*,
‘ and *proper Miracles*; yet

‘ I Believe, that *Miracles alone considered*
‘ can prove nothing at all, and ought to
‘ have no *Weight or Influence* with any
‘ *Body*: They never can be taken for the
‘ *proper Evidence or Proof of any Doctrine*,
‘ or justify us in receiving any *Doctrine*
‘ as from *G O D*; for there is no *Connec-*
‘ *tion between the Power of working Mira-*
‘ *cles, and the Truth of the Doctrines taught*
‘ *by the Miracle-Worker; and false Pro-*
‘ *phets, the most wicked Seducers, and the*
‘ *Devil himself may work Miracles* *: And
‘ hence I infer, that though it be admit-
‘ ted, that no *Person* before, or after *Je-*
‘ *sus Christ*, ever wrought such *Miracles* as
‘ he did, both for the *Number and Great-*
‘ *ness* of them; yet they not only can be
‘ no *proper Proof* of his *Doctrines*, but are
‘ also no *proper Credentials* of his *Divine*
‘ *Mission or Authority*; though he often
‘ appealed to them as such^e, and declared
‘ that he wrought them for this Purpose,
‘ that by these *Miraculous Testimonials* he
‘ might appear to be what he pretended,
‘ an *extraordinary Prophet or Messenger*
‘ sent from *G O D*.

‘ I Believe,

* See *Moral Philosopher*, Pag. 98, 99, 345.

^e Compare Matth. xi. 4, 5, 20, 21. John v. 36.
x. 25, 37, 38. xiv. 11.

‘ I Believe, that He hath wilfully *per-*
‘ *verted*, or ignorantly *mistaken*, the true
‘ Application and original Intendment of
‘ the *Jewish Prophecies* in every Instance:
‘ Or if *some of them* in the most obvious
‘ Construction *seem to point* to his Person,
‘ Character, and Sufferings, yet the *plain*
‘ *Accomplishment* of *these* in him, (since
‘ there is an *Obscurity* in some of the
‘ *Rest*,) doth not prove him to be *the*
‘ *Messiah* promised to the *Jews*: Though
‘ it must be owned, that *he came* about
‘ the Time prefixed in *Prophecy* for the
‘ *Messiah’s Coming*, and declared himself
‘ to be *He*^f: And if he was not, *the*
‘ *Messiah* is not yet come, though the
‘ Time fixed for his Coming is 1700 Years
‘ elapsed. But

‘ I Believe, that notwithstanding the
‘ *Deceit* he practised, in so often declaring
‘ that *GOD sent him*, when he *did not*,
‘ and that He was *the Messiah* promised
‘ to the *Jews*, when he *was not*; and
‘ notwithstanding his great *Mistake* in ap-
‘ pealing to his *Miracles*, as the *proper*
‘ *Proofs* of his Doctrine, which were *no*
‘ *such Things*; yet He was a *Prophet of*
‘ *of immortal and unrivaled Glory*, who
‘ *bath given us the best Account of the*
‘ Nature,

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^f Mark xiv. 61, 62. John iv. 26. ix. 37.

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‘ *Nature, Attributes, and Will of GOD,*
‘ *of any other Prophet or Lawgiver in the*
‘ *World* *.

‘ I Believe, that though the Religion
‘ of which *Jefus* is said to be the *Found-*
‘ *der*, contains in it *nothing* that is *contrary*
‘ to the Dictates of *Natural Religion*, but
‘ is indeed *the highest Improvement* of it;
‘ and, it must be owned, hath many
‘ *plausible Marks* of a *Superior Authority*;
‘ and, upon the Whole, is such as I can-
‘ not deny it *becoming GOD* to give, if
‘ there were any *Need* of an *immediate*
‘ *Revelation*: Yet I believe, that even *this*,
‘ tho’ added to the Testimony of *Miracles*,
‘ and the supposed Accomplishment of
‘ *Prophecy*, does *not* amount to an *Evi-*
‘ *dence sufficient* to induce a *Reasonable*
‘ *Man* to conclude it *Divine*.

‘ I Believe, if it were *proper*, or *necef-*
‘ *sary*, that *GOD* should give an *imme-*
‘ *diate Revelation* from Heaven, such as
‘ *Christians* pretend theirs to be, that *that*
‘ *Revelation* ought to contain in it *nothing*
‘ but what is *adapted* to the Capacity of
‘ *our Understandings*; and that if it con-
‘ tain any Doctrines *our Reason* cannot
‘ *comprehend*, not only *those Doctrines*
‘ ought to be *rejected*, but the Credit of
‘ the

* See *Moral Philosopher*, Pag. 167.

‘ the whole Revelation ought to be suspected, upon that Score only.

‘ I Believe, that the many Miracles wrought by the Apostles of Jesus Christ and their Successors, which were the Means of converting such Multitudes to the Christian Faith, in Opposition to all their worldly Interests and Prejudices, were not a proper or sufficient Means of a Rational Conviction; and that their changing their Religion was merely the Effect of Delusion and Weakness: To which also is to be attributed the great Success the Gospel met with, among the ignorant and superstitious People, in all Parts of the World where it was preached.

‘ All these Things I do firmly believe; and am fully persuaded that it is only owing to Bigotry and the Prejudices of Education, that all other Men of Sense do not believe the same.’

I am not very confident, Gentlemen, that you are willing to subscribe the several Articles of this Negative Creed: And if you are not, I am sure, I am very far from imposing them. Nay, I am not satisfied, that you will avow them, as the Principles you ever openly and directly maintained: And I do not affirm that they

they are. — I only say, It is obvious enough to every one, that hath but dipp'd into the *Controversy* between you and the *Christians*, that *these* are the *Sentiments* you *seem* to have imbib'd *yourselves*, and appear *willing* to infuse into the Minds of *others*, in Opposition to the Doctrines and Obligations of the *Christian System*. They are what you strongly *insinuate*, and endeavour *obliquely* to possess others in Favour of; though they are most of them so *gross* and Abhorrent to *common Sense* and *Reason*, that you care not to *speak them out*, or even to see them set in a *plain, naked, and undisguised View*: Which is the Reason you so constantly have Recourse to *Colouring, Chicanery, and Subtilty*; and keep at such a Distance from *plain Language, plain Reason, and plain Facts*.

But now, with *this* let us compare the *Christian's Creed*, or that *Set of Principles* in which *all Christians*, as *Christians*, agree, in Opposition to the fore-mentioned *Tenets of Infidelity*.

THE CHRISTIAN'S CREED.

‘ **W**E Believe, that the *Human*
 ‘ *Mind* in its present State is so
 ‘ *weak and disordered*, and the *Light of*
 ‘ *Nature*,

‘ *Nature*, or the *Reason* of Mankind, so
‘ *dark* and *defective* with regard to many
‘ Things of great Importance, that the
‘ World stood much in *Need* of an *express*
‘ and *immediate Revelation* from *GOD*
‘ himself, to conduct them more *safely*
‘ to their Duty and Happiness: That they
‘ wanted more *Light*, and more *Strength*;
‘ a more *undoubted Evidence* of the Truth
‘ and Reality of certain Principles relating
‘ to *GOD* and a *Future State*, about
‘ which the World hath been much in
‘ the dark; and some more *powerful Mo-*
‘ *tive* and *Influence* to inforce those Prin-
‘ ciples with Weight and Vigour upon
‘ their Minds: (The *Two great Ends* and
‘ *Advantages*, which might be hoped for
‘ and expected from a *Revelation coming*
‘ *from GOD* :) And that *such a Revela-*
‘ *tion* *GOD* could make to the World, if
‘ he *pleased*.

‘ We *Believe*, that Almighty *GOD*, of
‘ his great Mercy to the World, hath been
‘ pleased *actually* to make *such a Revela-*
‘ *tion* to Mankind; not only *heretofore*,
‘ in a more limited and imperfect Man-
‘ ner by his *Prophets*; but *in these latter*
‘ *Ages* of the World, in a more full and
‘ comprehensive Manner by his Son *Jesus*
‘ *Christ*: And that the *Book* which goes
‘ under the Title of *THE NEW TESTA-*

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‘ MENT OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR
‘ JESUS CHRIST, contains *that Reve-*
‘ *lation.*

‘ We Believe the *Historical Part* of
‘ *this Book* to be a true and genuine Ac-
‘ count of *Matter of Fact*: Because it
‘ hath none of the usual Characters of a
‘ *Forgery*; but on the contrary, all the
‘ approved Marks of *Credibility*, which a
‘ *History of that Date*, (and which hath
‘ never been *contradicted* by any other
‘ *History*, since the Time of its first Pub-
‘ lication,) can be supposed to have.

‘ We Believe from hence therefore,
‘ that in the Time of *Tiberius Cæsar*
‘ the *Roman Emperor*, there lived in
‘ *Judæa* an extraordinary Person known
‘ by the Name of JESUS CHRIST; who
‘ gave out, that he was *the Messiah* so
‘ long promised to the *Jews*, and a *Pro-*
‘ *phet* and *Messenger sent from GOD*, to
‘ introduce a *new Dispensation*, and make
‘ a *new Revelation* of the Mind and Will
‘ of GOD to the World: That he came
‘ *not of himself*, but was *actually com-*
‘ *missioned and sent of GOD*; to whom,
‘ in an eminent and peculiar Manner he
‘ stood in the Relation of a *Son*: And
‘ that, in the Excellence of his *Doctrines*,
‘ the Benevolence of his *Temper*, the Be-
‘ neficence of his *Actions*, and the unble-
‘ mished

‘ We *Believe* therefore, that *Jesus Christ* was, what he pretended and so often declared himself to be, a *true Prophet*, in an *extraordinary Manner sent from GOD*; and consequently, that the *Doctrines* he taught were *Divine Doctrines*, or a *Revelation coming from GOD*. And in *this Belief* we are *confirmed*:—— *Because*, whatever *Darkness* there may be in the *Style and Sense of some of the antient Prophecies*, yet upon a general and impartial View *they appear plainly* to have *pointed to Him* as the *intended Messiah*; and *many of them*, which foretold the *Manner and Time* of his appearing in the *World, his Actions, Sufferings, and Death*, were *accomplished in Him* with a very singular, surprizing, and circumstantial *Accuracy*:—— *Because* the *Doctrines* he taught were so *rational, so spiritual and pure*, that they appeared *worthy of GOD*, and exactly *suitd* to the *Necessities and Emergencies of Human Nature*: And—— *Because* in order to awaken and fix the *Attention of Mankind* to the *Truth and Importance* of his *Doctrines*, he produced the *Credentials* of

' his

‘ his *Divine Mission*; and proved himself
 ‘ to be the *Messenger* and *Prophet of GOD*,
 ‘ by working such a wonderful Series of
 ‘ great and real *Miracles*, as were never
 ‘ wrought by any one before him; and
 ‘ which he declared he wrought by a
 ‘ *Power* derived to him from *his Father*:
 ‘ And finally,——*Because*, the *Spirit of*
 ‘ *Prophecy* evidently rested upon him;
 ‘ whereby he several Times *foretold* the
 ‘ Manner of *his own Death*, and that
 ‘ GOD would miraculously *raise him up*
 ‘ *from the Dead* on the *third Day*, as a
 ‘ publick Testimony to the whole World
 ‘ of his Acceptance and Approbation of
 ‘ Him, as his *faithful Servant*, *Messenger*,
 ‘ and *Prophet*; and that all that he did
 ‘ and taught, was in *His Name*, and by
 ‘ *His Authority*.

‘ We *Believe* further, upon the Credit
 ‘ of the aforesaid *History*, that *Jesus Christ*
 ‘ was, according to his own Prediction,
 ‘ *actually raised from the Dead* on the
 ‘ *third Day* after his Death, by the *Power*
 ‘ of his *Father*, notwithstanding all pos-
 ‘ sible *Precautions* were taken by the
 ‘ *Jews* to prevent his Body from being
 ‘ stolen away; whereby GOD authorised
 ‘ and approved what he had done, *set his*
 ‘ *last Seal* to his *Mission*, and declared his
 ‘ Acknow-

‘ Acknowledgment of him as *his Prophet*,
‘ and that his *Doctrine* was *Divine*.

‘ And, in as much as *he promised* to his
‘ *Apostles* and *Disciples*, before his Death,
‘ that he would send down upon them
‘ *the Spirit of Inspiration*, which should
‘ infallibly *guide them into all Truth*^g, and
‘ enable them to *instruct the World* in those
‘ Precepts and Principles of the *Christian*
‘ *Dispensation*, which were left to be
‘ made known and propagated by them :
‘ And as they were in an extraordinary
‘ Manner *actually endowed* with this *Spirit*
‘ *of Truth* and *Inspiration*, (together with
‘ many other *extraordinary Gifts*,) on the
‘ Day of *Pentecost*^h : And as the *Writings*
‘ which are still extant *under their Names*,
‘ and are generally received as *Canonical*,
‘ have not only the *proper Marks* of their
‘ being *genuine* and *authentick*, but several
‘ *visible Characters* of a *Divine Revelation* :
‘ We therefore *receive* them *as such*, and
‘ *Believe* the *Doctrines* contained in them
‘ to be *from GOD*.

‘ And though we cannot *receive every*
‘ *Thing*, which is supposed by some to
‘ be authorised by these *Sacred Writings*,
‘ as a *Divine Doctrine*, (because we are
‘ sensible, that through the *Ignorance* and

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‘ *Super-*

^g John xvi. 13.

^h Acts ii. *init.*

‘ *Superstition* of Men they have been
 ‘ *mistaken*;) yet we do not think, that a
 ‘ *Doctrine* plainly and frequently incul-
 ‘ cated there as a *Divinely reveal’d Doc-*
 ‘ *trine*, is to be *rejected* purely because
 ‘ it is *above the Comprehension of our Rea-*
 ‘ *son*; much less, that the *whole Revela-*
 ‘ *tion* is to be *rejected* upon this Account,
 ‘ for this plain Reason: *Because* we have
 ‘ much *greater Evidence* in general, that
 ‘ the *Revelation* in which it is contained
 ‘ is *Divine*, than we have that *that* par-
 ‘ ticular *Doctrine* is *false*; since its being
 ‘ only *incomprehensible* to our *Reason*, and
 ‘ not *contrary* to it, amounts to no more
 ‘ than this; that *it may be true*, for ought
 ‘ we know.

‘ And the wonderful and rapid *Progress*
 ‘ the *Gospel* made in the World soon after
 ‘ its Publication, the glorious and trium-
 ‘ phant *Success* it met with, and that by
 ‘ the weakest Means, and in Opposition
 ‘ to all the carnal Prejudices, earthly In-
 ‘ terests, and rooted Superstitions of Men,
 ‘ we *Believe* to be owing to its *Divine*
 ‘ *Authority* and *Power* over their Hearts
 ‘ and Consciences, through the special
 ‘ Operation and Influence of that *Holy*
 ‘ *Spirit* that indited it: Because we can-
 ‘ not see how *that Fact*, so extraordinary
 ‘ and

‘ and uncontested, can be *accounted for*
‘ upon any other supposed Principle.

‘ These Things we do firmly *Believe* :
‘ And tho’ we acknowledge, We are as
‘ *liable to Prejudice* as other Men, yet
‘ upon the most impartial Judgment we
‘ are able to make of the whole Matter,
‘ *this System of Principles* appears to us
‘ by far the *most rational and consistent*
‘ *Scheme*, as well as the *most friendly* to
‘ the best Interests of Mankind: There-
‘ fore we adhere to it, and are not ashamed
‘ to declare ourselves *Christians*.’

Now, *Gentlemen*, if these Things are fairly stated, (and I am sure, I have no Design to misrepresent them,) I would only ask at present, *Which* of these *Two Systems of Principles* a Reasonable Man would chuse to embrace? *Which* of these upon the whole appears *most Rational, Just, and Credible*? In the fair, open, and undisguised Light in which they have now been set, I am persuaded no Reasonable Man can hesitate *which to prefer*. Strip them both of those *false Colourings*, in which you study to misrepresent them, and view them in the *plain and naked Light*, in which they now stand before you, (and in which I have endeavoured to comprize the *Principal Heads* of the whole

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whole Controversy between you and us,) and perhaps you may not think *your own Scheme* so solid and unexceptionable, or the *Christian's* so weak and indefensible, as you affect to represent them.

Let me intreat you also, *Gentlemen*, to consider,

QUERY X.

Whether the same Degree of Evidence, which you have for the Truth of the Christian Religion, would not abundantly satisfy and determine you in any Affairs of Common Life? Nay, whether you do not often take up with much less Evidence, as fully sufficient in other Cases?

No doubt, but you are ready to return an immediate *Answer* to this *Query* in the *Negative*. But I beseech you to reconsider, and think upon the Matter coolly: Lay all the common *Evidences of Christianity*, both *External* and *Internal*, in a fair and impartial View, and then bethink yourselves seriously, Whether, if you were to act the same Part in *Common Life*, which you do with regard to the *Christian Religion*, you would not be deemed Persons of a very *unhappy Scrupulosity*.

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Is it not your usual Way in *judging* of the *Truth* of *Two different Sentiments* relating to other Points, whether of *Politics, History, or Philosophy*, first to inform yourselves of the *true State of the Case* on both Sides; carefully to collect and compare, with all the Accuracy and Penetration you are Masters of, *every Argument* that is produced *for*, and *every Objection* that is urged *against* each of those Sentiments; and then to determine in Favour of *that Side of the Question*, where you find the *strongest Arguments*, and the *weakest Objections* to lie? or where you observe, upon a proper Ballance, the *Arguments for it* to have more Weight than the *Objections against it*; even though *those Objections* may not be solved to your entire Satisfaction? — For the Light of *Evidence* may in some Cases be so *glaring*, and the Strength of *Argument* so *irrefragable*, as even to *force an Assent* to the Truth of *some Propositions*, every *Objection* against which, when urged with Art and Address, we may *not be able to answer*.

Now, whatever *Difficulties* there may be in the *Christian Scheme*, you are not so *sanguine*, I imagine, as to think there are *none* in *your own*: And what ever be the Strength of *Argument* on *your Side* of the *Question*, I hope you will allow,
that

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that there is some *Appearance of Argument* on *ours*. The Case then is, On *which Side* do the *fewest Difficulties* and the *strongest Arguments* lie? *That*, and *that alone*, is what ought to *determine you*. Or if, when the *Arguments* and *Objections* are fairly weighed on *both Sides*, they appear, upon the Whole, to be *Equal*, or so near to an Equality, that you know not on which Side lies the greater Weight; *then* (since you cannot stand *Neuter* in this Cause, but must embrace either one Side or other,) *that which should* (and on all other like Occasions *would*) *determine you* is, to consider *which Side* of the Question is the *safest*, and to keep to *that* wherein a *Mistake* will be attended with the *least Detriment*. — This is the Part, now, which as wise Men, you *should act*. This is the Part you *do act*, in all Affairs of Importance in *Common Life*. Why then should you not act the same cautious, prudential, and just Part with regard to *Religion*? Why should you labour to aggravate every *Appearance of Difficulty* on *our Side*, without attending to the *real Difficulties* on *your own*? Why are you still throwing out the *same* vulgar, trite *Objections against Christianity*, (which have been a Hundred Times repeated, and a Hundred Times answered,) without taking the
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the least Notice of those *solid Answers* that have been made to them; or without taking the least Care to remove those *many Difficulties* and *Objections*, which plainly embarrass *your own Scheme*? Why should you *strain, stretch, and torture every Argument* to the utmost that seems to make *for you*; and *laugh at*, instead of answering, *those* that are full *against you*? Is this to act like *Impartial Enquirers*? May not the *worst Cause* in the World be *maintained* in this Manner?—All that *Christianity* demands is, that you would but coolly *examine its Evidence*, and give it the *same fair Treatment* you would any other Subject of Importance, about which you would form your Judgment; and when the *whole Evidence* is fairly collected, stated, and review'd, that you would seriously consider with yourselves, whether it be not *much greater* than *that*, upon which you oftentimes readily give your Assent to Questions of much less Importance.

“ This *Socratick Method*, (you will say,) “ *proves nothing*: These endless *Interrogatories* will never convince you.”—It may be so: But possibly, they may excite *your Attention* to some Things which *need no Proof*; and perhaps put you into a Way of *convincing yourselves*.——“ But

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“ is

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“ is it not *taking for granted* the Things
 “ that ought first to be demonstrated, and
 “ *begging* all along the *grand Point* in
 “ *Dispute?*” No, *Gentlemen*, it is only
begging you more seriously and closely to
examine the *grand Point in Dispute*, and
 putting you upon returning a *fair Answer*
 to a few *fair Questions*; and letting you
 see, that tho’ plain and sober *Christians* are
 not to be imposed upon, yet it is possible
 you yourselves may, by mistaking *Artifice*,
Ridicule, and *Sophistry*, for *Argument*,
Reason, and *Sense*.

There is another Thing, *Gentlemen*, up-
 on which you must give us Leave to
 remonstrate in the Cause of our *holy Re-*
ligion, wherein we think we have just
 Ground of Complaint, and as to which
 you would do well to consider,

QUERY XI.

Whether in representing the Nature, In-
fluence, and Tendency of our Religion,
and its several Doctrines, you always
keep close to the plain Christian Insti-
tutes, as contained in the New Testa-
ment? Or whether, indeed, you do
not take Advantage from those absurd
and wild Notions which some Christians
maintain, to expose Christianity itself;
 tho’

tho' you must know, that by far the greatest Number of wise and intelligent Christians disclaim those Notions, as having no Foundation in Scripture?

If some have *mistaken* the Notion of *Faith*, and imagined it to amount sometimes to *preternatural Inspiration*, is that a sufficient Ground to *libel Christianity?* or to insinuate and urge from thence, (as the forementioned *Author* does,) that it *hath*, and *can have* no other *Foundation?* that *no Evidence*, but that of *Faith*, is sufficient to give any one *a full Satisfaction* of the *Truth* of it? and, because *some Christians* have happened to *mistake that Word*, to pretend, that *this mistaken Sense* of it is the *only Foundation* we have for our *Religion*, and that in the very Face of common *Sense*, *Reason*, and *Scripture?* For whatever Opinion I may have of the *Morality* of that *witty Writer*, I have a better one of *his Parts*, than to imagine that he ever really *thought himself*, that there was the least Argument in *those Proofs* he pretends to advance from *Reason* and *Scripture*, in Support of so frantick a Notion*. — And if some *warm, unwary Christians* have spoken too disparagingly perhaps of

K 2 *Reason,*

* See *Christianity not founded on Argument*, pag. 8, 54.

Reason, in Opposition to *Faith*; must therefore the *whole Body of Christians*, and *Christianity itself* be defam'd, burlesqu'd, and represented in the most *ridiculous Light*, as disclaiming *all Manner of Reason* in Religion, "as that *which is not the proper Province of it*, being indeed an "Affair where *she has not any Concern*, "and where *Reason is ever entirely excluded the Question * ?*"

Nay, if some have not only *mistaken its Principles*, but *perverted its Precepts*, what is that to the Purpose? unless you will take upon you to affirm, (which I suppose you will not,) "that it is essential to the *true Religion*, that there "should be *no Hypocrites*, superstitious "Zealots, Bigots, or Enthusiasts among "the Professors of it?"—Are not the *best Things* capable of the *worst Abuse*? Is it any Argument against the native Excellence of a Thing, that it hath been corrupted, disguised, and adulterated? It is never allowed fair, you know, to *condemn a whole Body*, or Party of Men, purely for the *Foibles and Misconduct* of a few; especially if they appear, upon the whole, to be discountenanced by the Party they belong to.

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* See *Christianity not founded on Argument*, Pag. 7, 55.

Do not imagine then, *Sirs*, that *Christianity* stands *accountable* for all the *Follies*, *Iniquities*, and *Absurdities*, that are committed under the *Name* of it; when they are expressly *forbidden* and *condemned* by it. It is an easy Matter to distinguish between *true Christianity*, as it stands in the *New Testament* in all its native Beauty and Simplicity, and the unamiable and frightful *Vizard* under which it often appears both Abroad and at Home. The *Follies of Christians* then, are what neither *you* nor *I* have any thing to do with, in examining the Merits and Evidences of the *Gospel-Religion*. And what ever *Shafts* you draw out of *that Quiver* to throw at the *Religion of Jesus*, you may be sure will be *in vain*: Nay, possibly they may *hurt your own Cause* by the *Rebound*. For perhaps, there is *more Solidity* in the *Inference* which is just the *Reverse* of what *you* would draw from thence; and *more Argument* in concluding, that, since *CORRUPTIO OPTIMI EST PESSIMA* is a most Uncontested and Universal Principle, *the Religion of Jesus*, if it were not *most Excellent* and *Divine*, would not be capable of such *Horrible Abuse*.

Give me Leave also, *Gentlemen*, to put you upon considering,

QUERY

QUERY XII.

What is it, after all, that you hope to gain by your Cause? Or what mighty Advantages do you propose to yourselves, or others, by labouring so assiduously to establish and propagate your Infidel Principles?

What Good have they *already* done you? Are you the *better*, or the *wiser* Men for them; more *Meek*, *Upright*, *Merciful*, *Benevolent*, and *Pious*, than you would be, if you were *Christians*? Or have you made *others* more *Temperate*, *Sober*, *Just*, *Honest*, *Charitable*, and *Righteous*, than they were before they were your *Profelytes*? Do you mortify your *Vices*, regulate your *Appetites*, govern your *Passions*, and cultivate all the *Humane*, *Social*, and *Divine Vertues*, more easily, or more effectually, under the Influence of your *Principles*, than *Christians* do under the Influence of of *theirs*? By your own Confession, we have the most *perfect Rules* of *Moral Righteousness* to walk by; (and you are not ashamed to adorn and finish your *System* from *ours* :) But we have at least *this particular Advantage* for practising them, that upon us they come with the Force of a

Divine

Divine Authority, urged with *Divine Sanctions*. We receive them with the Reverence, and Subjection of Soul, due to *Truths* and *Precepts*, which we (not only see to be of *great Importance*, but) believe to be immediately revealed from *Heaven*: Whilst you receive them, but as the *Sentiments* of a *common Moralist*, as liable to *Mistake* as yourselves; yea, as the *Sentiments* of *one*, whom you believe in many Points to have been *actually mistaken*; and which you conceive you are *under no Obligations* to observe any farther, than they are *agreeable to* (your *own Disposition* and *Humour* in reality, tho' you seem often to mistake it in calling it by the Name of) *your Reason* and *Judgment*.

But, *Sirs*, admitting *your Cause* to be true; and granting you all you contend for: Put the Case, that *the Religion of Nature* is all that we have in reality to trust to; the only Thing, by which we must *stand or fall* at last: And *supposing* after all, that *Christianity* is nothing but what you would have the World believe it is, *a downright Forgery* and *Imposition* on the Understanding and Consciences of Men: Yet *what can We be the worse for this?*—Since *Christianity* confessedly includes all the Obligations of *Morality*;
and

and since *We* think ourselves as *strictly bound* to live up to those Obligations as *You*: If then *We* as *conscientiously* endeavour it as *You*, we humbly hope, (and indeed have Reason to hope,) that *We* shall in the End be *as happy as you*; and that the All-Righteous and All-Merciful GOD, will not impute to us as a Crime, *a Mistake* that we were led into thro' the Weakness of our Understandings; *a Mistake*, that had so many plausible Appearances of Truth, which we were betrayed into thro' a conscientious Fear of offending him; and *a Mistake* too, which never did us *any Harm*, but *Good*; and made us *more zealous, uniform, and constant* in our Regards to all the Precepts and Obligations of *Moral Vertue*.

Wherefore granting you all you contend for; let Things turn out at last as they may, we hope *We* shall *fare as well* as *You*, provided we maintain the same unshaken Attachment to the Cause of *Vertue*; without which, we know, we can be no *true Christians*. So that, in short, as *You* will be no *Gainers* in the End, in Case *your Cause be true*; so, if we live as *Christians*, we are sure, that *We can be no Losers*.

But,

But, in the last Place, let me importunately beg of you, *Gentlemen*, to consider with the utmost Seriousness,

QUERY XIII.

What must your Case be, if Christianity should be true?

This at least you will allow to be a *supposeable Case*: And tho' a *Mistake* on our Side can do us no Harm; a *Mistake* on yours must be fatal. Were the *Probability* of a *Mistake* then equal on both Sides, yet where the *Consequences* of one are infinitely unequal, who would not chuse to be on the *safest Side*? Suppose the *Ballance* then be *Equal*; and you apprehend, it is altogether as likely, that *We* are in the *Mistake*, as that *You* are: If the *Mistake* should fall at last on our Side, we have this Advantage still, that we lose nothing: But should it fall on your Side, (as upon this Supposition it is every whit as probable it may,) *Oh, what do you lose!*

Will your pretended Zeal for the Religion of Nature, think you, be admitted hereafter as an Excuse for your rejecting that of Revelation; which God hath been pleased to superadd, to dispel the Darkness,

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and supply the Deficiency of *that*? especially when *this* is accompanied with all the *Credentials*, and *Marks of Divinity*, which an *express Revelation from Heaven* can be supposed to come with?

What you may think of it, *Sirs*, I know not; but most *certain* it is, (and the Truth is as *awful*, as it is *certain*;) that *if Christianity be true*, your State hereafter *cannot be safe*. If the Gospel be, after all, a *Divine Revelation*, your future Condition *must be miserable* beyond Imagination: For there stands in it, you know, a *Sentence of Condemnation* full against you; which there is no possible Way of your avoiding, but upon the Supposition that *Jesus Christ*, who pronounced it, is a *Deceiver*, and his whole Gospel an *Imposture*. But give me Leave to turn you to it, as a *Text* well worthy of your most serious Comments: Hear it then from the Mouth of *Jesus Christ* himself: *He that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the Name of the only begotten Son of GODⁱ: Yea, He that believeth not the Son, shall not see Life; but the Wrath of GOD abideth on him^k.* As these Words, from the Nature of the Thing, must necessarily be supposed to refer

ⁱ John iii. 18.

^k Ver. 36.

fer only to *those*, to whom the *Gospel* in its glorious *Light* and *Power* hath been offered or published, and who have had sufficient *Opportunity* and *Capacity* to judge of its *Evidence*; so they must as necessarily extend to *every one*, who does *not believe it in those Circumstances*. There is no *Room* to question this, if in those *Words*, [*that believe not,*] They are principally intended who are *destitute* of that *Influential* and *Vital Faith*, which produces a *Subjection* of *Soul* to the *Authority* of *Christ*, and a *Conformity* of *Life* and *Temper* to his *Word*, (as is generally supposed :) Or whoever are chiefly to be understood thereby, most certain it is, that *They* must be comprehended therein, who not only *disbelieve* the *Divinity* of *Christ's Mission*, but openly *disavow* and *defy* the *Authority* of his *Gospel*, with all the glaring *Light* and *Evidence* of it *shining full in their Faces*: For these can in no *Sense* be said to *believe in the Name of the Son of GOD*. Nor are such *absolute* and *severe Denunciations* at all *Incongruous* to a *Divine Revelation*, where the *Evidences* of it appear with the *utmost Light* and *Force*, and are represented in such various and convincing *Views*, that the *rejecting them*, (after a sufficient *Opportunity*

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portunity and Capacity to discern them,) must necessarily proceed from the *Perverseness* of the *Heart*, and not the *Weakness* of the *Understanding*.

And this I take to be a sufficient Answer to all the Exceptions, that may be made to these *Damnatory Clauses*. If they be *no Proof* of themselves of the *Divinity of Scripture*, (as no Body ever pretended they were,) it is enough that they are *no Argument against it*: Since they are very becoming the *Authority* of a *Divine Revelation*, provided the *Evidence* of it be *so clear*, that it *cannot be rejected* without *great Wilfulness* and *Obstinacy*; and therefore are what the *Enemies of Christianity* can have no Room to turn to the Advantage of *their Cause*, and indeed have nothing to do with, but to take Care to escape them.

You see then, *Gentlemen*, where the *Thunder* of these *Denunciations* is directly pointed: And in so dangerous a Circumstance, rather than out of a fatal Temerity to *slight*, *laugh at*, and *defy it*, (as some of you are hardy enough to do *,) it would be *wise* and *salutary* in you to get as fast as possible *out of the Reach* of it,
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* See *Christianity not founded on Argument*, Pag. 8, 9.

'ere it suddenly burst on your Heads, and overwhelm you with unutterable Horror.

What *you* may see, *Sirs*, I know not; but I own, I can see *no possible Way* of evading this plain, this terrible Consequence. If *Christianity* be *false*, you have indeed *nothing to fear* from that *Condemning Sentence* of *Jesus Christ*: But if *Christianity* be *true*, that *Sentence* must be *true*; and if *that* be *true*, you have *every Thing* to *fear* from it: The *dreadful Meaning* of which, I had rather you should *conceive*, than I *describe*.

The Case then, *Sirs*, comes plainly to this. You actually *pawn your Souls* upon it, that *Christianity* is a *Falshood* and a *Forgery*:—A dangerous and dreadful *Bett* indeed!—Would any Man in his Wits be willing to *stake his Eternal Happiness* on a Point, where there appear'd the least *Possibility of losing*? Wherein if he were *in the Right*, he would be *no Gainer*; but if *in the Wrong*, would be *undone for ever*! —What must be said then of the Man, who dares to lay *that dreadful Bett* on a Point, where there is not only *a Possibility*, but *a Probability* of losing! and where it is at least *as likely*, that he should be *in*
the

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the Wrong, as in the Right!—Is this
a Sober, a Safe, a Wise, or a Rational
Part?*

And now give me Leave, with the utmost Seriousness and Sincerity, to adopt the Words of a certain *Writer in your Cause* *, with a little Variation in order to take off the *profane* and *blasphemous Sneer*, and to conclude with offering up my most ardent Prayers in your Behalf at the Throne of Grace, that GOD would be pleased to remove your Prejudices, to engage your Attention to the Evidences of his Holy Gospel, and to illuminate and irradiate your Minds with a perfect and thorough Conviction of the Truth of it; and that the same Holy Spirit that first dictated that Divine Law, would powerfully set to his Seal, and attest its Authority in your Hearts; that He would graciously vouchsafe to renew once more his disregarded Notices, and establish in you that Knowledge of its strict Veracity, which the Apostle had when he said, *We believe, and are sure that Jesus is the Christ.*—And may GOD Almighty of his Infinite Mercy grant, that you may see the fatal Precipice before you; that
you

* See *Christianity not founded on Argument*, Pag. 112.

you may escape the Ruin you are running upon ; and that you may not have Reason to lament it for ever *in the other World*, that you would not act like MEN *in this !*

F I N I S.





